

THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SOUTH AFRICA.¹

MR. McCALL THEAL, the celebrated historian of South Africa, introduced into his volumes on that subject, published first of all some fifteen or more years ago, a variety of chapters and paragraphs on the traditional history, the habits and customs of the South African natives—Bushmen, Hottentots, and Bantu negroes. He considered that this work, owing to its being scattered through a number of volumes was not sufficiently useful or accessible to students of South Africa, and therefore has now selected much of his ethnographical material from the aforesaid history, and has republished it in a separate book, the volume under review. To these chapters originally written, we may suppose, about twenty years ago—or even more—he has added a good deal of recent research work, and it may be said at once that although in some respects this book is not quite up-to-date and fails to appreciate some of the newest theories and most recently discovered facts, it is likely to be essential to all students of Africa for a long time to come. It is eminently readable; and although there are a few mistakes, such as perhaps no such work could be exempt from, the slight defects of the book are rather in the nature of omission than of commission.

Perhaps Mr. McCall Theal's greatest mistake is in connection with the Bushmen and their relationships. He is apt to assume, first, that the Bushmen were the only human race in the Old World, living in a condition of absolute savagery, which at the same time was gifted with a remarkable power of design and an irresistible inclination to make pictures, and to engrave, puncture, scratch, or paint those pictures on rock surfaces. He is therefore inclined to ascribe to Bushmen the marvellously good prehistoric drawings, painting, and engravings which have been discovered during the last fifty years in the caves of France and Spain. But, in the first place, it must be pointed out that the men of the Palæolithic and Neolithic ages who did those drawings have been claimed by other ethnologists as of Eskimo race, simple because the Eskimo, like the Bushman, had the same pictorial gift. Similarly, again, they might be represented as Amerindians or Australoids. It is best to suspend judgment on this subject until we have a far more complete array of evidence. It seems probable that man very early in his history as *Homo sapiens* developed the art of drawing. This art, indeed, is present almost without exception in all savage or uncivilised races at the present day, though in some it remains dormant until a chance circumstance draws it out.

Mr. McCall Theal is also in error when he continues (in spite of all that has been written and pub-

¹ "The Yellow and Dark-skinned People of Africa, South of the Zambezi." A Description of the Bushmen, the Hottentots, and particularly the Bantu, and numerous Folklore Tales of these different People. By Dr. G. McCall Theal. Pp. xvi+397+15 plates. (London : Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd., 1910.) Price 10s. 6d.

lished on this subject during the past ten years) to identify the Bushmen with the Congo pygmies, and with other stunted negro races of equatorial or tropical Africa. Dr. F. C. Shrubshall, in reviewing the collections of the present writer, Dr. Arthur Keith, Prof. Duckworth, Dr. Elliot Smith, to say nothing of various German and French anthropologists, have during the past ten years conclusively shown that there was no connection (other than that they were both members of the negro subspecies) between the Bushmen and the Congo pygmies. The last-named are nothing but stunted Forest negroes, whom the peculiar conditions of life in the dense forests have dwarfed. Removed from these unfavourable conditions, the Congo pygmy in the second or third generation grows to a more ordinary stature. Neither in language nor in physique do the Congo pygmies stand apart from the other black negroes.

But the Bushman is a most distinct type of the negro subspecies, due to a divergent development

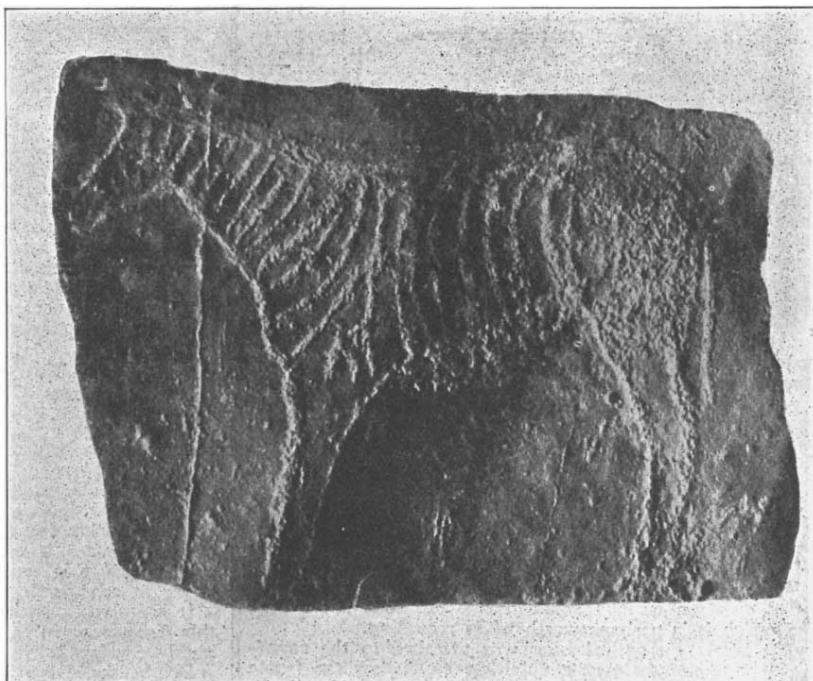


FIG. 1.—Engraving of a Zebra on a Rock in the District of Vryburg. The original is 13 inches in length. From "The Yellow and Dark-skinned People of Africa, South of the Zambezi."

which may be conceivably fifty to a hundred thousand years old. The Hottentot, of course, is nothing but a cross between the black negro and the Bushman.

Mr. Theal descants on the usually hideous aspect, the ultra-negro character of the Bantu Damara (he might have added also, of the Berg-Damara or Haukwain), but this is likewise a superficial pronouncement. Among the other Herero, and even amongst the Berg-Damara, there are types (some of which the present writer has illustrated through the kindness of the Royal Geographical Society) which might be selected as those of the ideal Bantu, faces almost Hamitic in profile, and even in the abundance and length of head hair. Yet the same tribal designations will cover creatures that might be mistaken for Congo pygmies or the most debased and animal-looking type of Forest negro.

Likewise amongst the Kafirs and Zulus, the aristocratic types are constantly being given as illustra-

tions of the degree of physical beauty to which the negro can attain : yet even amongst these tribes and peoples there are Forest negro types of simian ugliness.

Mr. Theal is conscious himself of the extraordinary mixture of racial types amongst the Bantu, and gives us a vivid picture of their inextricable maze of wanderings in past times. But, of course, all the races of South Africa descended from the north at one time or another. Whether the first arrival of the Bantu-speaking negroes south of the Zambezi was as late in the world's history as Mr. Theal surmises, is a question as to which we cannot arrive at a very pre-

sent? With this again is mixed up the mystery of Zimbabwe. Prof. Randall McIver's researches and criticisms have badly damaged the theory which seemed at one time such a convenient one to explain Zimbabwe and similar ruins : that South-East Africa was colonised perhaps two thousand years ago or earlier, by a foreign, Semitic people—possibly the Arabs of southern Arabia. Prof. von Luschan, of Berlin, has gone into this subject more recently than Prof. McIver, and feels bound to endorse his objections to the art and architecture of Zimbabwe being of extra-African origin. Yet the art and architecture are profoundly unlike anything which has hitherto been developed by the typical Bantu peoples of East or South Africa ; and the Makaranga peoples, who are still the principal indigenes of all this region of ruins between the Limpopo and the Zambezi, contain, as Mr. Theal points out quite truly, so many individuals of semi-Caucasian lineaments.

Of late, one or two German ethnologists have pointed out the remarkable resemblance between the soapstone birds, and some other emblems of Zimbabwe, and the art of north-western Kamerun, the interior of the Cross River district (see for further light on this the remarkable paper on the Ekoi by Mr. P. A. Talbot in the December number of the *Geographical Magazine*), and even of Benin and Yoruba. The influence of this particular West Africa culture certainly penetrated, athwart all Bantu linguistic influence, down the Congo coast to the mouth of the Congo and to the western parts of the Congo Basin. Can it possibly have traversed Central Africa to reach a great isolated development in the region between the Zambezi and the Transvaal ? The physical type of the negroes associated with this Yoruba-Kamerun art is typically negro, but would not differ very markedly in skull formation from that of the average Bantu negro. So far, no skull remains dug up in or near any of these "Zimbabwe" ruins are other than negro of the Bantu type.

Mr. Theal is not able in this book to throw any fresh light on another South African mystery : the place of origin of the Zulus, that is to say, of the dominating tribes or castes in southernmost Africa, which created the present Kafir-Zulu language or group of dialects. Far from this Zulu-Kafir language being what in earlier days was styled by various writers the Sanskrit of the Bantu (that is to say, the Bantu language most nearly representing the original mother tongue, and the most archaic in its features),

contrary is the case. Zulu-Kafir is in some respects a widely aberrant member of the Bantu family : the most aberrant, if one exclude from purview certain worn-down forms of speech in the heart of the Congo Basin or the Kamerun. It has probably adopted its three clicks from the Bushmen, but the clicks matter little in comparison with the large proportion of the word-roots which have been—one might think—specially invented and are without any known relationships in other Bantu tongues. The culture of the Zulu recalls strikingly that of the Masai, the most southern in its

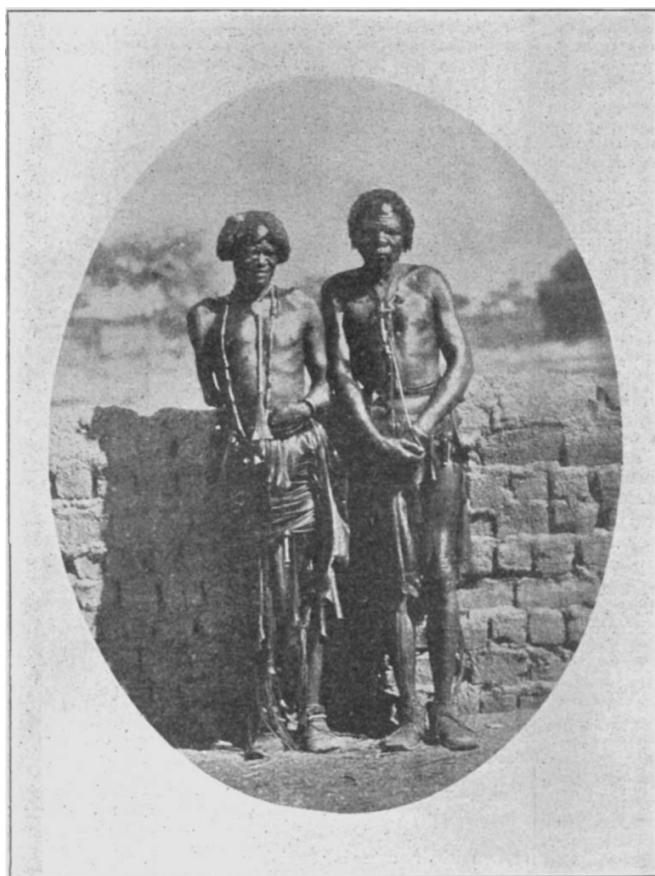


FIG. 2.—Portrait of Herero Men. From "The Yellow and Dark-skinned People of Africa, South of the Zambezi."

cise decision, though he is more likely to be right in his approximate dates than some of his earlier critics. But, of course, it is *inconceivable* that the Bantu invaders, if they came so late in history, found that the southern third of Africa was merely sparsely populated with Bushmen and a few Hottentot hybrids, or the lingering Strandloopers (who may have been more of the forest negro type and are alleged to have preceded the Bushmen). There must have been a fairly abundant negro population in the fertile regions of South-East Africa. To what group or groups did this belong? What language families did they re-

range of the Nilotc negro peoples of East Africa. But, so far as I know, not a single Masai, Gala, or Nilotc negro word-root has yet been discovered in the Zulu speech. The main relationships of this very isolated language are with the East African Bantu, though there are strands of West African Bantu in its composition. It has, of course, affinities with the Herero group, and this again is related almost equally to the West African, the East African Bantu, and to the archaic forms of Bantu speech still existing in and about the Victoria and Albert Nyanzas.

Mr. Theal's book has some excellent examples of southern Bantu folklore, though a few of these stories have been so often repeated by other writers (borrowing from him) that they are a little stale. So also are the illustrations, which may be said to have become common property, being derived from early photographs and drawings going back to the 'seventies and even 'fifties. But a very important (and it seems to the reviewer more or less novel) part of the book is that which deals in pp. 264-73, and in chapter xxiv., with the growth in mental development of the South African Bantu and their increase in numbers under a civilised régime. On the whole, Mr. Theal's observations would seem to point to a very decided and more or less permanent improvement in mental development and well-being; while as to their increase in numbers under the *Pax Britannica*, there can be no question whatever.

His observations on monogamy *versus* polygamy would seem—whether he intends it or not—to bear out in a moderate way the opinions of various missionaries and students of Africa, that under monogamy the rate of increase is at least as great as that which prevails under the conditions of polygamy, and perhaps is greater; while the improvement in morals and the well-being and bringing up of children under the system of "one husband, one wife," can no longer be disputed.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC BIOGRAPHY OF BIRDS.¹

THE present volume is a companion to the "Home Life of a Golden Eagle," noticed in NATURE of May 26, 1910. It is about the same size, but four biographies instead of one are contained in it. The "Home Life of a Golden Eagle" as a *vie intime* will be difficult to excel. It admitted us, by means of that impersonal spy, the camera, to the closest intimacy with the entire domestic arrangements, and to the unbroken succession of parental duties of the royal birds. Mr. Beetham has attempted to do for the spoonbill, the white stork, and the common and the purple herons, what Mr. Macpherson did for the eagle. We have to confess with regret that he has succeeded only *multum post intervalum*. Both watchers employed from an ambush the same methods of the masked camera; but we have from Mr. Beetham fuller details of the methods than of the object for which they were the end. Both were experts in picture-taking, and our author's results are in no way inferior to those of Mr. Macpherson. The methods they employed are, it seems to us, those by which the accurate life-histories of our birds up to the standard of that of the golden eagle can be obtained. It will take a long time before they can all be biographed, but it will eventually be accomplished so long as among the photo-ornithologists are to be numbered men like Mr. Beetham, who despise the unnumbered difficulties, discomforts, and often very real dangers necessary to securing unimpeachable records.

¹ "The Home-life of the Spoonbill, the Stork, and Some Herons." Photographed and Described by B. Beetham. Pp. viii+47+52 mounted plates. (London: Witherby and Co., 1910.) Price 5s. net.

To be of real value, however, the observations must be a continuous series of the same subject taken at carefully chosen intervals, accompanied by detailed descriptions of careful personal observations. In this respect the present budget of biographies leaves much to be desired. Instead of a connected diary we have disconnected glimpses into the different households through swings of the door. The "Home Life of a Spoonbill" can hardly be called more than a passing "look in" at the nursery. Yet the peeps we do get are not without value, and many are very interesting, but they are solitary episodes in the bird's history. Plates i. and ii. refer to one home; there its story ends. The remaining nine are pictures of another home. Plate iii. was photographed on June 17, iv. and v. on June 19, and the remaining six on June 23. We are introduced to the young spoonbills when they are ten days old; we next re-visit their home



FIG. 1.—The claw of each toe has a strong hooking action. From "The Home-life of the Spoonbill," by Bentley Beetham.

when their age is twelve and fifteen days respectively, when this second biography—which had no beginning—also ends.

This is a very great contrast to the absorbingly interesting development of the golden eagle's nestling in unbroken sequence, from its birth to its coming of age. Not more satisfying is the record of the white stork, which begins when the storklings are fully fledged, and though we have eight very excellent photographs of them, we learn nothing about their plumage changes and little about their upbringing and education by their parents. We are equally disappointed with what can hardly be called the "home-life" of the common and the purple herons. We are brought on the scene when the first chick of the former emerges on April 11; then the door is closed for six weeks—the most interesting period of the